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ABSTRACT

This report responds to Illinois State Board of Higher Education's policies on improving undergraduate education that called for cooperation among institutions of higher education in monitoring the academic progress, retention, and graduation of undergraduate students. The report examines the enrollment, transfer, and degree attainment patterns of baccalaureate recipients, including the time taken to earn the baccalaureate degree. It focuses on those students who received their baccalaureate degrees from an Illinois public university in either fiscal year 1991 or 1992 and retrospectively looks at their enrollment, transfer, and degree attainment history. Statistical data indicate the following: (1) two-thirds of the students who enrolled at a community college for more than half of their total terms earned an associate degree prior to the baccalaureate; and (2) 23 percent of the students completed their baccalaureate degrees in exactly 4 academic years, another 16 percent completed in more than 4 years but less than 4.5 years, and 15 percent completed their baccalaureate degree in less than 4 years. (GLR)

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STATE OF ILLINOIS
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

ED 360 284

ENROLLMENT, TRANSFER, AND DEGREE PATTERNS OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITY BACCALAUREATE RECIPIENTS

This report responds to the Board's policies on improving undergraduate education that called for cooperation among institutions of higher education in monitoring the academic progress, retention, and graduation of undergraduate students. The report examines the enrollment, transfer, and degree attainment patterns of baccalaureate recipients, including the time taken to earn the baccalaureate degree. Unlike previous retention and graduation reports that followed first-time freshmen from their first matriculation in a public university through graduation, this report focuses on those students who received their baccalaureate degrees from a public university in either fiscal year 1991 or 1992 and looks backward at their enrollment, transfer, and degree attainment history. The report also discusses future analytical work needed on graduation and transfer and on factors that affect the time students take to earn a degree.

In September 1990, the Board of Higher Education adopted the recommendations of the reconvened Committee on the Study of Undergraduate Education. Two of these recommendations called upon public universities and community colleges to continue initiatives for monitoring student progress, retention, and degree completion. These initiatives, the High School Feedback System and the public university retention and graduation studies, were developed in response to the initial Committee's recommendations in 1986. A third recommendation called for the development of a new statewide system for monitoring the academic progress of community college students who transferred to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

To implement this new system recommended by the Committee, the 49 community colleges and the 12 public universities cooperated in constructing a data system that permits the examination of individual student enrollment and degree patterns across institutions while maintaining the confidentiality of individual students. The system annually merges all enrollment and degree records for all Illinois public university and community college undergraduate students and returns to each public institution pertinent data for each of its students who have either enrolled at or received a degree from any other public institution in Illinois. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale maintains the system and the security of the database. The data for this analysis of enrollment, transfer, and degree earning patterns are drawn from this new shared database.

The database includes demographic, enrollment, and degree data. Demographic data elements include birth year and month, gender, and race. Enrollment data elements include the institution, the enrollment year and terms, type of program, student major, class level, and enrollment type (first-time freshman, first-time transfer, or other). Degree data include the institution, the degree year and term, the type of degree conferred, and the student major.

The database currently contains over 7 million separate enrollment and degree records for approximately 2.5 million individual students who either enrolled in or received a degree from a community college or public university in Illinois between fiscal years 1983 and 1992. The variation in student attendance and earned-degree patterns represented in the database is remarkable. Of the approximately 2.5 million students in the complete database, over 1.7 million (71 percent) enrolled only within the community college sector, and another 336,000 students (14 percent) enrolled only within the public university sector. Thirteen percent of the students transferred among sectors: 174,000 students (7 percent) first enrolled at a community college and later transferred to a public

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university; 137,000 students (6 percent) first enrolled at a public university and later enrolled at a community college; and 4,000 students (less than one percent) first enrolled *concurrently* at both a public university and a community college. For three percent of the students in the file, there is degree information but no enrollment information. Records for the 58,846 students who received their first public university baccalaureate degrees in fiscal years 1991 and 1992 were selected for this analysis.

Enrollment and Transfer Patterns

The 58,846 students who received their baccalaureate degrees from a public university in either fiscal year 1991 or 1992 enrolled from one to 28 terms during their academic careers. Since the shared enrollment and graduation database does not differentiate course loads within a term, a term of enrollment can represent a single course or an overload. Figure 1 graphically displays the distribution of terms enrolled in public institutions before baccalaureate graduation. The greatest number of students (10,533) enrolled for nine terms prior to graduation. Nine terms is also the median (i.e., half of the recipients were enrolled for nine or fewer terms, while half enrolled for more than nine terms). As Figure 1 shows, however, the majority of the students enrolled between 7 and 12 terms. Indeed, 75 percent (or 44,281 students) enrolled between 7 and 12 terms.

Figure 1 also shows that some students received their baccalaureate degrees after as few as one, two, or three enrollment terms. There are several explanations for this pattern. First, the database is limited to enrollment and degree records from public institutions in Illinois. Thus, students who have transferred into a public institution from an out-of-state institution or from an in-state private institution do not have previous enrollment histories on the data file. Second, according to campus representatives, an increasing number of students are earning advanced placement credit and accelerating academic progress through testing and other alternative assessment measures. Third, the database begins with summer term enrollments in 1982. Some students may have accumulated credits prior to that time, then stopped-out altogether or attended a private or out-of-state institution, and then returned to finish the baccalaureate degree from a public university during the years represented in the database.

Slightly more than one-third of the baccalaureate recipients, 22,612 (38 percent), enrolled for all of their terms at a single public university. The remaining 36,234 students enrolled for at least one term at a public university different from the one from which they earned their baccalaureate or in a community college. Table 1 disaggregates these 36,234 students among different institutional attendance patterns and among three enrollment term patterns. Specifically, Table 1 shows three institutional attendance patterns: the first pattern includes those students who attended another public university in addition to the one from which they received their baccalaureate degree; the second includes students who attended a community college in addition to the baccalaureate degree-granting institution; and the third includes those who attended both a community college and another public university in addition to the baccalaureate degree-granting institution.

Table 1 also groups students into three different enrollment patterns based on the proportion of terms spent at the public university from which they received their degrees. The first group includes students who enrolled for less than 25 percent of their terms at another institution, the second includes students who enrolled for at least 25 percent and up to 50 percent of their terms at another institution, and, the third, students who enrolled for more than 50 percent of their terms at another institution.

The most notable feature in Table 1 is the large number of students (17,077, or 29 percent of the total number of baccalaureate recipients) who attended a community college in addition to the public university from which they received their degrees and who also enrolled for less than 25 percent of their terms at the community college. Further analysis shows that 9,912 (58 percent) of the 17,077

Figure 1
Number of Terms Enrolled Before Graduation

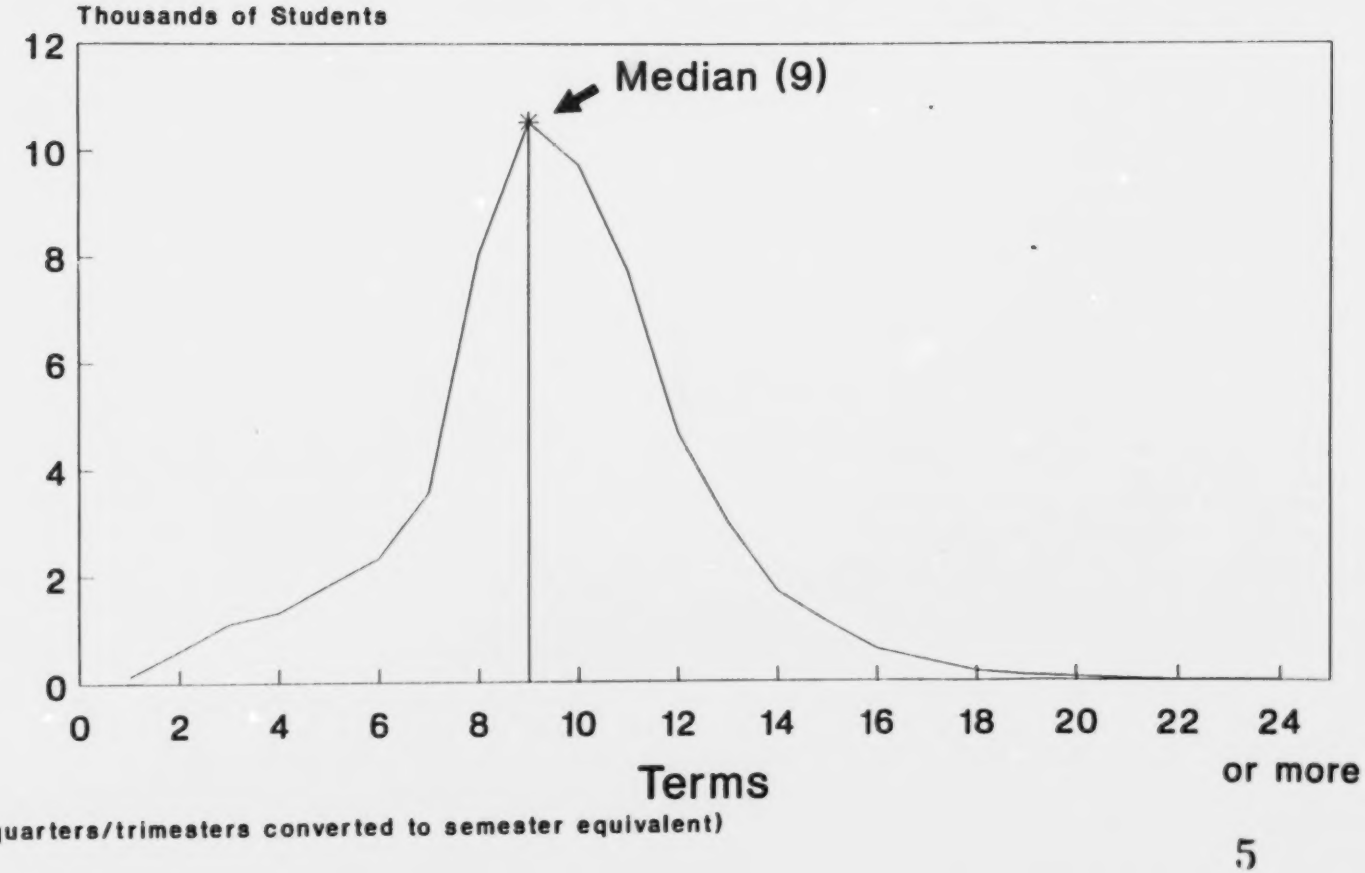

Table 1

FISCAL YEAR 1991 AND 1992 PUBLIC UNIVERSITY BACCALAUREATE RECIPIENTS
ENROLLMENT TERM PATTERNS AND INSTITUTIONAL ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

Institutional Attendance Pattern	Enrollment Term Pattern: Less Than 25 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution	Enrollment Term Pattern: Between 25 and 50 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution	Enrollment Term Pattern: More Than 50 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution	Total
Attended Another Public University in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	986	641	254	1,881
Attended a Community College in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	17,077 [1]	9,896	3,393	30,366
Attended a Community College and and Another Public University in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	673	1,649	1,665	3,987
Total	18,736	12,186	5,312	36,234

[1] Community college enrollments were in the summer only for 9,912 of these 17,077 baccalaureate recipients.

Source: Illinois Public Universities' and Community Colleges' Shared Enrollment and Graduation Files

only attended the community college during summer terms. Although the database does not differentiate course loads within terms, it is likely that most of these students are public university students enrolling for a course or two during the summer at their local community college.

Table 1 also shows that only about 5 percent (1,881) of the baccalaureate recipients who transferred between institutions did so within the public university sector. A higher proportion (3,987 students, or 11 percent) attended both a community college and another public university. After the 9,912 students attending a public university and a community college in the summers only, the next most popular attendance pattern (9,896 students) was enrolling at a community college in addition to the baccalaureate granting institution for between 25 and 50 percent of the total terms enrolled.

Brief "portraits" are presented in the accompanying boxes to illustrate the variety of enrollment patterns of students who received their degrees in fiscal years 1991 and 1992. The names, of course, are fabricated, since the database does not include student names or other readily identifiable characteristics that would violate confidentiality.

"Mary" entered Western Illinois University in fall 1988 at age 18. She re-enrolled at Western both fall and spring semesters for the next four years. In the summer between her junior and senior years, she also enrolled at Parkland College. Mary earned her B.S. in Communication Sciences and Disorders from Western Illinois University in spring 1992. In all, Mary completed her degree in four years, enrolling for nine terms.

"Sam" enrolled at Northern Illinois University at age 18 in the fall semester 1986, re-enrolling both fall and spring semesters at Northern for the next four years. During the summers of 1987 and 1988, he also enrolled concurrently at Moraine Valley Community College. Sam earned his B.F.A. in Studio Arts in fall 1990. Altogether, Sam was enrolled for 11 terms, nine of which were at Northern Illinois University, and graduated in 4.3 academic years.

"John" enrolled at the University of Illinois at Chicago in fall 1986 at age 18 and attended for five consecutive quarter terms (excluding summers). In summer 1988, he transferred to Moraine Valley Community College, attending both summer and fall 1988. In spring 1989, John enrolled concurrently at Moraine Valley Community College and at Illinois State University. John continued at Illinois State in the fall and spring semesters for the next two years, ultimately earning his B.S. in Industrial Technology in summer 1991. John was enrolled for 11 separate semesters, but they were spread among three institutions over 5.1 academic years.

"Jane" enrolled at State Community College in East St. Louis in fall 1985 at age 26. She attended for five quarters and earned her Associate in Arts degree in spring 1987. In fall 1987, she re-enrolled at State Community College, but also concurrently enrolled at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Jane enrolled continuously at Edwardsville for the next 10 consecutive quarters, ultimately receiving her B.A. in English Language and Literature in the spring 1990 at age 32. Jane was enrolled for the equivalent of 11 semesters, spread over 5.6 academic years.

The Associate Degree

For each cell of Table 1, Table 2 shows the proportion of students in the cell who earned associate degrees prior to receiving their baccalaureate degrees. The low percentages in the first row of Table 2, students who attended another public university in addition to their baccalaureate institution, represent students who received associate degrees from the College of Technical Careers at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and then transferred to another public university. The low percentage in the first column in Table 2, students who enrolled for fewer than 25 percent of the total terms at another institution, suggests that it was never their intention to earn an associate degree en route to the baccalaureate degree.

Two-thirds of the students who enrolled at a community college for more than half of their total terms earned an associate degree

Table 2

PROPORTION OF FISCAL YEAR 1991 AND 1992 PUBLIC UNIVERSITY BACCALAUREATE RECIPIENTS[1] EARNING ASSOCIATE DEGREES PRIOR TO THEIR BACCALAUREATE DEGREES

	Enrollment Term Pattern			
Institutional Attendance Pattern	Less Than 25 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution	Between 25 and 50 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution	More Than 50 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution	Total
Attended Another Public University in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	0.8 %	2.5 %	1.2 %	1.4 %
Attended a Community College in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	4.6	15.9	67.7	27.2
Attended a Community College and and Another Public University in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	2.5	21.3	39.8	25.9
Total	4.3 %	45.5 %	55.8 %	22.9 %

[1] These percentages represent the proportion of students in each cell on Table 1 who received associate degrees prior to their baccalaureate degrees.

Source: Illinois Public Universities' and Community Colleges' Shared Enrollment and Graduation Files

prior to the baccalaureate. About 40 percent of the students who attended both a community college and another public university prior to the baccalaureate granting institution earned an associate degree. Many of these students first enrolled at one public university, transferred to a community college, and then transferred to the baccalaureate granting institution.

Elapsed Time to Baccalaureate Degree

In addition to looking at the number of terms a student was enrolled prior to graduation, an elapsed number of academic years to degree completion was calculated for each student. Elapsed time to degree is the number of academic years between the first enrollment and graduation adjusted for the actual terms in which a student enrolls and graduates. Figure 2 displays the number of academic years to degree completion for all students who received baccalaureate degrees in fiscal years 1991 and 1992.

Several features in Figure 2 are worth noting. A significant proportion (23 percent) of the students completed their baccalaureate degrees in exactly four academic years. Another 16 percent completed in more than four years but less than 4.5 years. When all fiscal year 1991 and 1992 public university baccalaureate degree recipients are considered, the median time to degree (i.e., the point that divides the sample of students in half) is 4.3 academic years. A second feature worth noting in Figure 2 is the regularity of graduation at whole numbers of academic years. These "spikes" in the figure reflect the fact that most students still begin their academic work in a fall term and graduate in a spring term. Finally, the figure points out that a sizable number of students complete their baccalaureate degrees in less than four years. In fact, 15 percent of the baccalaureate recipients did so.

Table 3 displays the median elapsed academic years to degree for each of the students shown in Table 1. The median time to degree for the 22,612 students who attended only one public university is 4.0. Table 3 shows that, in general, the median elapsed number of academic years to graduation increases as the proportion of coursework taken in an institution other than the baccalaureate degree-granting institution increases. For example, the median number of academic years to degree for students enrolling in both a community college and another public university for more than half of their terms is 6.0. In contrast, the median number of years for students enrolling at a community college for less than 25 percent of their terms is 4.3, the same as the median for all graduates.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Illinois' diverse system of higher education with its comprehensive community colleges and numerous public universities and private colleges and universities is predicated on the successful articulation and transfer of students among sectors for those students who choose to transfer. While the community colleges' missions extend beyond baccalaureate transfer, transfer remains one of their primary functions. This preliminary examination of the enrollment-to-degree-completion histories of baccalaureate recipients underscores the importance of interinstitutional articulation and transfer. Almost two-thirds of the public university baccalaureate recipients enrolled for at least one course at another public institution during their academic careers. Many students are enrolling concurrently in more than one institution or are using the community college system to augment their work at public universities. These data show that students are adapting the diverse, comprehensive system to meet their individual needs.

The report to the Board on gradation rates and time to degree in October 1992 identified several potential factors that affect students' time to baccalaureate degree completion. Several of these factors, in addition to transfer behavior, could be examined with the data contained in the shared enrollment and graduation files. Among these factors are interrupted attendance, changes in degree or program major, institutional selectivity, and personal demographics such as age, gender and

Figure 2
Academic Years Elapsed Before Graduation

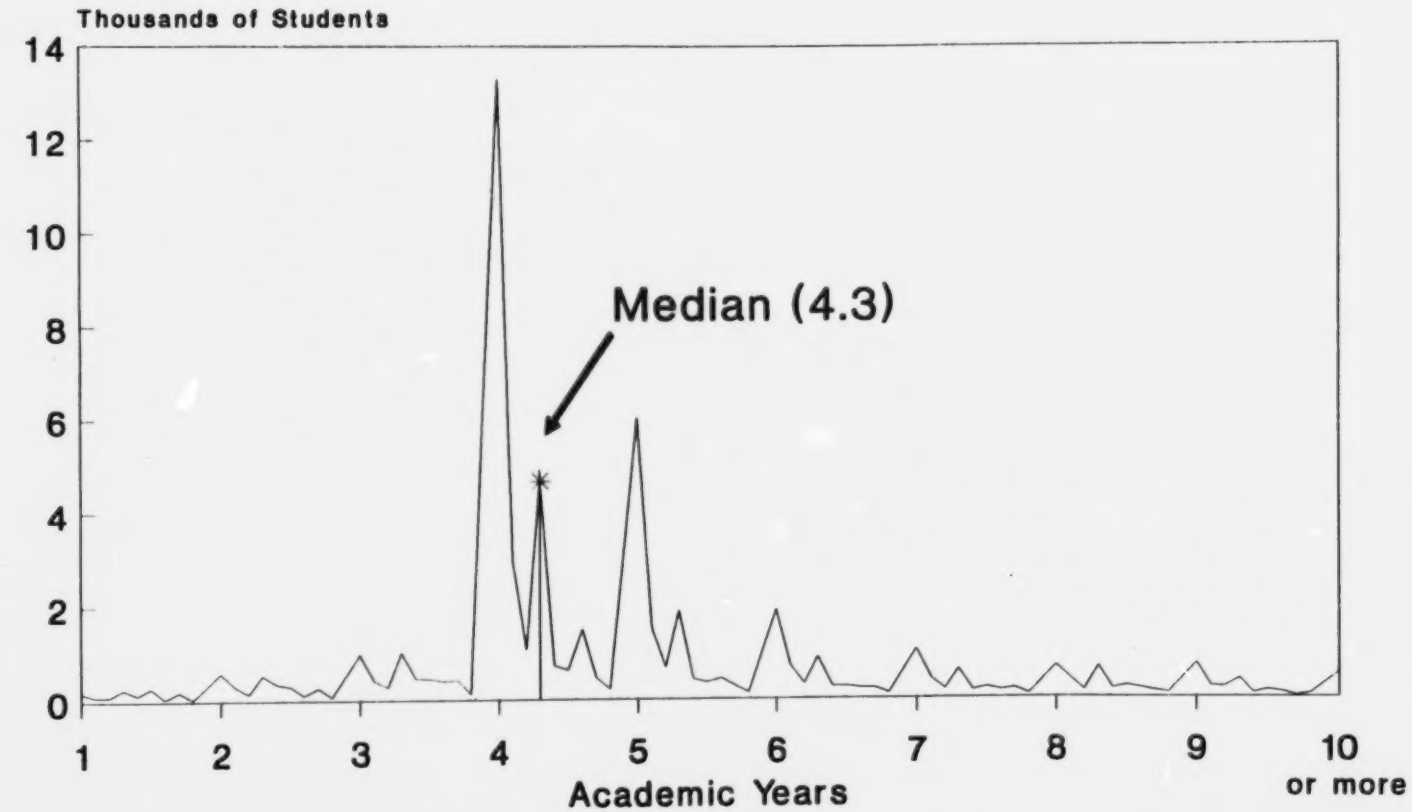

Table 3

MEDIAN ACADEMIC YEARS TO BACCALAUREATE DEGREE FOR FISCAL YEAR 1991 AND 1992 PUBLIC UNIVERSITY BACCALAUREATE RECIPIENTS

Institutional Attendance Pattern	Enrollment Term Pattern: Less Than 25 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution	Enrollment Term Pattern: Between 25 and 50 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution	Enrollment Term Pattern: More Than 50 Percent of All Semesters Taken At Another Institution
Attended Another Public University in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	4.8	5.0	5.0
Attended a Community College in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	4.3	5.0	5.5
Attended a Community College and and Another Public University in Addition to the Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	5.0	5.4	6.0

Source: Illinois Public Universities' and Community Colleges' Shared Enrollment and Graduation Files

race/ethnicity. The Board of Higher Education staff is currently working with representatives of the public universities and community colleges to establish a schedule for such analytic work and will report the results to the Board.

The Board of Higher Education staff has also consulted with representatives from private institutions about the feasibility of establishing a similar system for Illinois private colleges and universities. The large number of institutions and students, the diversity in record keeping, and the range in technological sophistication are some of the issues that will need to be addressed.

The shared enrollment and graduation database is also being used for other applications beyond enrollment, transfer, and time-to-degree analyses. The public universities and community colleges have worked together to produce a community college feedback report for transfer students modelled after the previously established High School Feedback System. The community college feedback report provides individual community colleges with information about their students who have transferred to each public university, as well as information about the academic progress and achievement of transfer students in comparison to students who begin at the university. Institutional representatives and Board staff are also investigating the feasibility of using the database to help fulfill institutions' data reporting responsibilities under the federal Student Right To Know legislation. Finally, the database can be used to better understand the enrollment patterns of students who enroll without completing degrees.